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## Blogs - 2015 - February

**2 Habits**

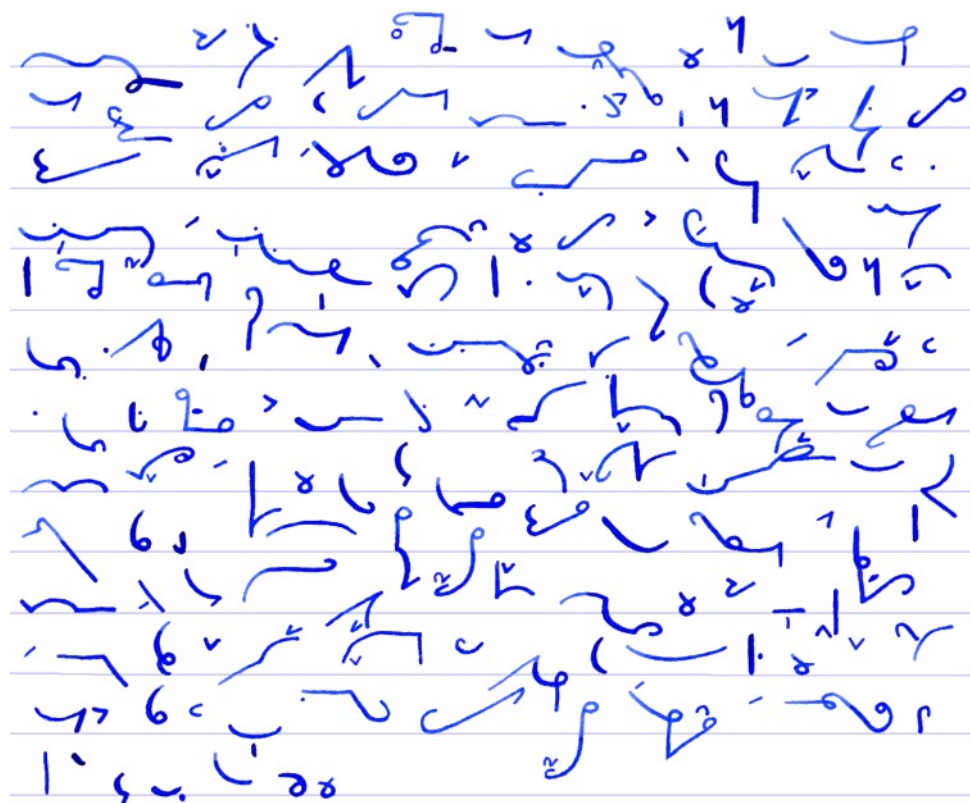
**5 Tides**

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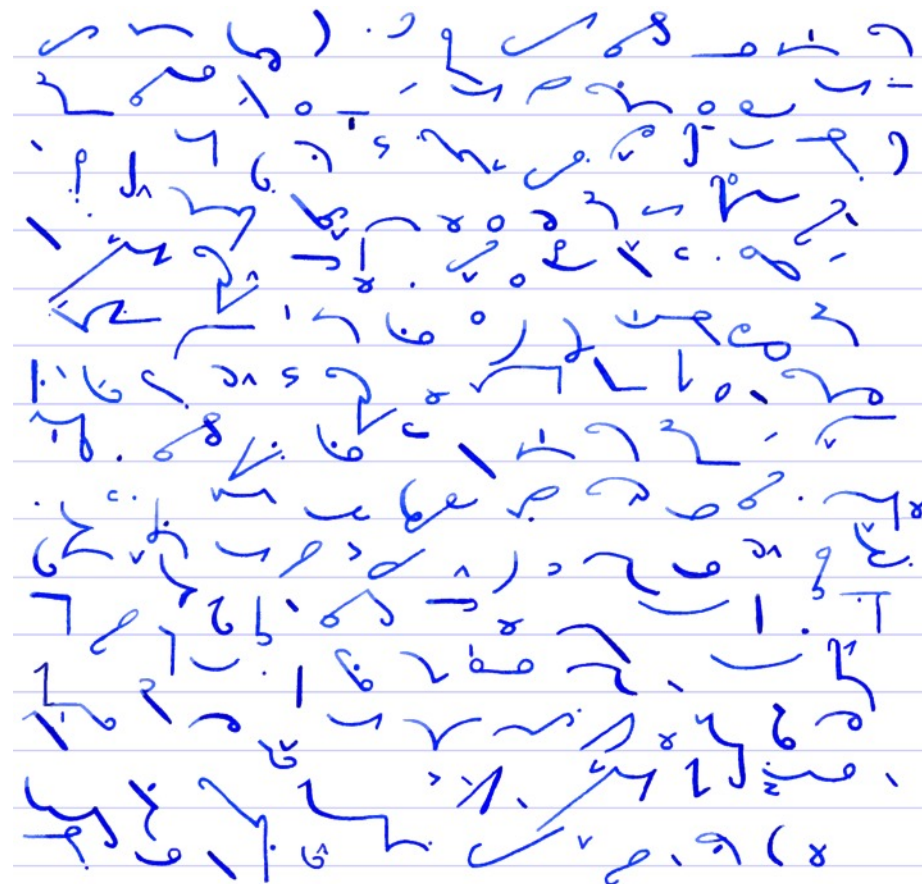
**Habits**

Many years ago I would avidly read the cartoons in the newspapers. I had no interest in the political ones that wanted to make a point, but I did enjoy the gentler ones that were light-hearted observations on the quirks of everyday life, with an innocuous and inoffensive humour. One of the fluffier publications not only had cartoons scattered throughout but also had an entire page of them. I had my favourite\* artists who managed to encapsulate whole personalities and reactions with a few deft strokes of the ink pen, and I greatly admired their skill in using the minimum of lines and detail. Even though the figures were wildly unrealistic in

shape and proportion, this did not matter, as it was the situation that was being presented, and the distortion had to make up for the lack of real time movement. I would cut out and keep those that I really liked, in order to\* revisit them another day. I particularly enjoyed those with no caption, where the situation, postures and expressions told it all without the need for words.

\* "favourite" Compare "favoured" which has the left hand Vr

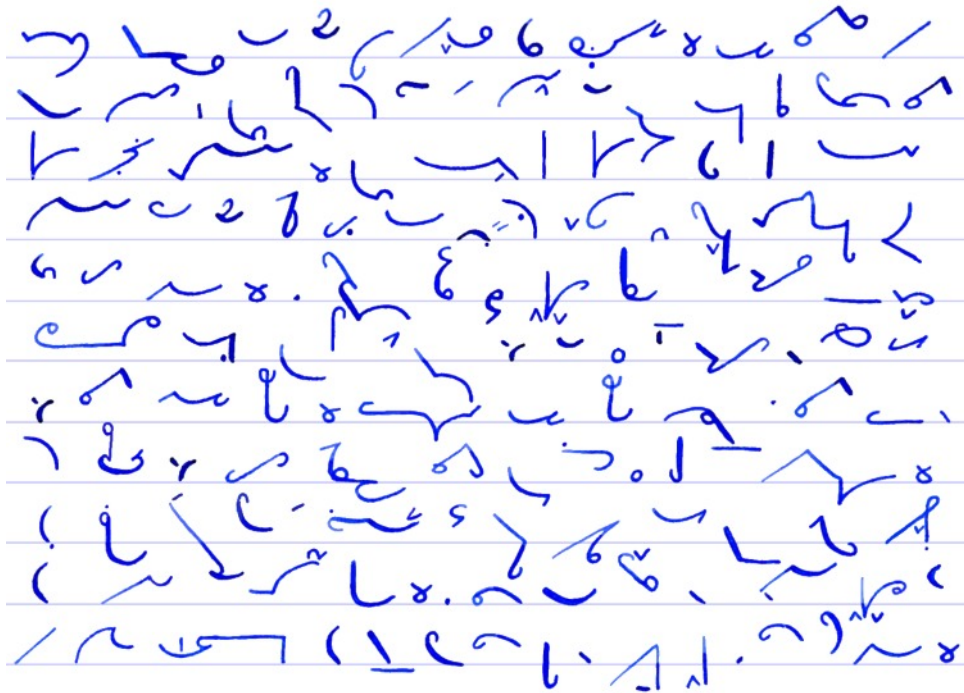
\* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"



**Habits**

One of my favourites was a short strip where the husband comes home from work, hangs up his coat, and, in the last frame, is seen in the act of sitting down onto thin air, with the appropriate whizz lines drawn in, expecting there to be an armchair behind him. His words were, "Darling, you've rearranged the furniture again!" The wife is standing by with a surprised and apologetic look on her face, as she sees the unexpected consequences of her day of fun playing around with the furniture. I looked back at the first two frames and noticed the husband's cheery face, glad to be home from work, and, like a film with a teaser, I

now knew this was not to last more than the next half a minute. Then I filled in the rest of the story, how she would move things around, he would finally get used to it, and then it would all happen again. Maybe another day the kettle and teacups would be in a different place, or the socks moved to another drawer and be impossible to find in the early-morning rush. I have done all this myself, having been both perpetrator and victim of the urge to rearrange, and had the annoyance of expecting things to be found where I used to store them.



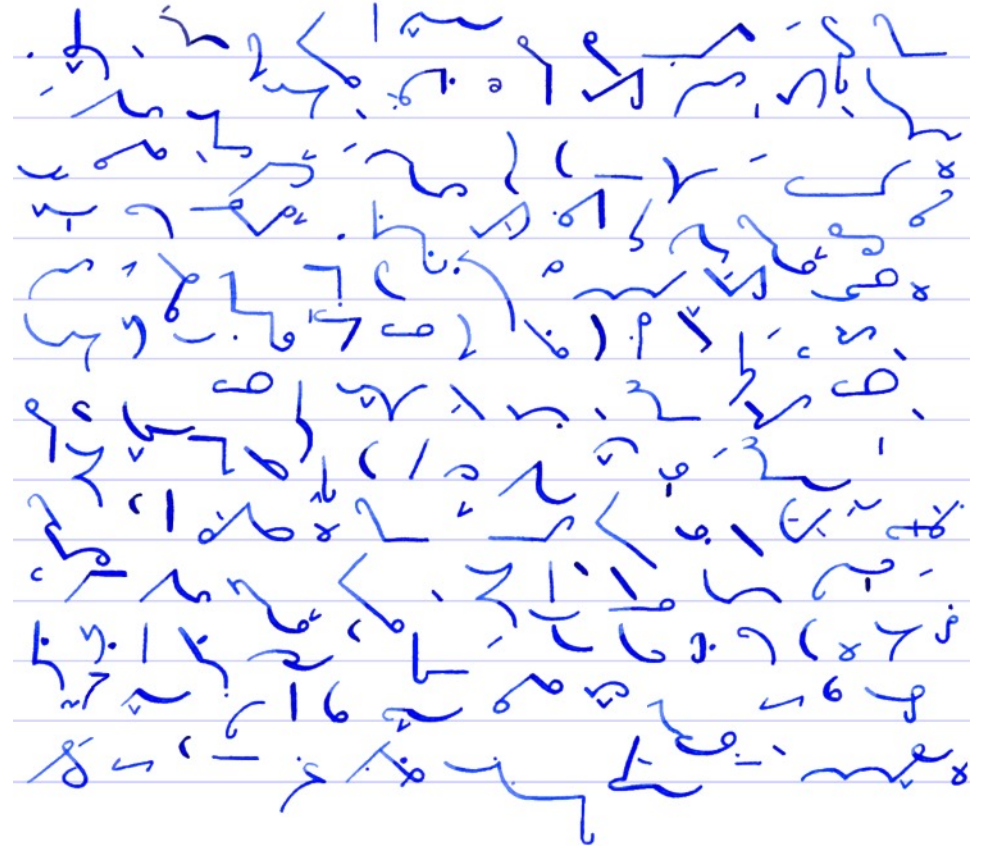
**Habits**

I am sure beginners in shorthand will recognise this scenario. New habits\* are being learned, but if you drop your guard and allow the hand to fall into its former habit, it will revert to longhand. If you interrupt it, it will then do neither longhand nor shorthand, and just wait in mid-air while you provide the alternative shape that you want written. The problem with this is that the outline does not always come to mind as quickly as needed, if at all, and the poor old hand is caught between two masters, old habit and new instruction. Clearly the new instruction must become a habit, equal to or stronger than the old one, and this can only\* happen if the action is

done repeatedly. Thinking, considering, pondering over and agreeing with the page of rules in the book, and even reciting them, are not actually doing. The same thing applies to wrong outlines that are left uncorrected, they become ever more difficult to root out, the more they are written.

\* "habits" "hobbies" Always insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

\* "this can only" On its own, "only" is written with full N and L strokes



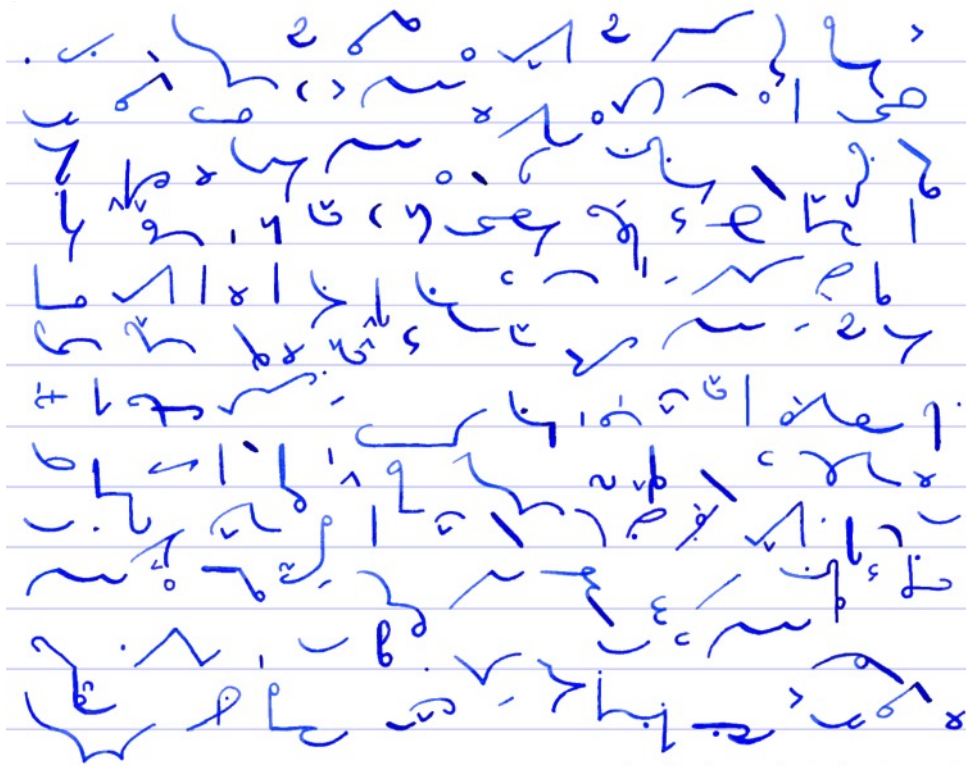
**Habits**

The desire to romp through the chapters at lightning speed has to be curbed, and plenty of practice and review undertaken, not only to consolidate what has already been learned but also to form the new habits of reaction and movement, so that they come easily and quickly. I know from experience the temptation to rush ahead which would leave the previous sections half learned and the passages and dictations getting ever harder, as the memory burden increases. Fortunately I was in a college class so the pace was set by the teacher, and when I went to speed-building evening classes, it was entirely up to me\* to work between classes to ensure I

got the best out of them, which meant reading my notes and working on problems that had surfaced. Practice on the current chapter needs to be thorough not cursory, with regular review of previous chapters, to ensure it all becomes familiar, well known, and, dare I say it, boring, meaning that difficulty and novelty have been drained from them. Only constant actual writing will do this, creating habits of mind and fingers, that is, instant responses, that can completely replace the ineffective juggling act of memorising.

\* "to me" Needs the vowel inserted, otherwise it would read "to him"





**Habits**

The way to form shorthand habits is to write shorthand regularly, so that the strength of the new habit equals that of the longhand. Reading is also important as it increases knowledge of outlines. Fortunately longhand is too well entrenched to be threatened by this additional system, but I did find that I was increasingly frustrated with the excessive time and effort\* it takes to write it, it fell out of favour with me and rapidly lost its former prime position. I found that the fight between longhand and shorthand only occurred at the very beginning of learning, and quickly faded, but some might find it surfacing during a fast dictation, it all

depends on how strict and firm you have decided to be with yourself. In a real life situation it might be your last resort to write a difficult word in longhand, as gaps and errors are not acceptable when you are entrusted with the task of producing a report, but in studies the pull to fill in with longhand must be firmly resisted, as it can only\* undermine and contaminate the gaining of the new habit.

\* Omission phrase "time (and) effort"

\* "it can only" On its own, "only" is written with full N and L strokes



**Habits**

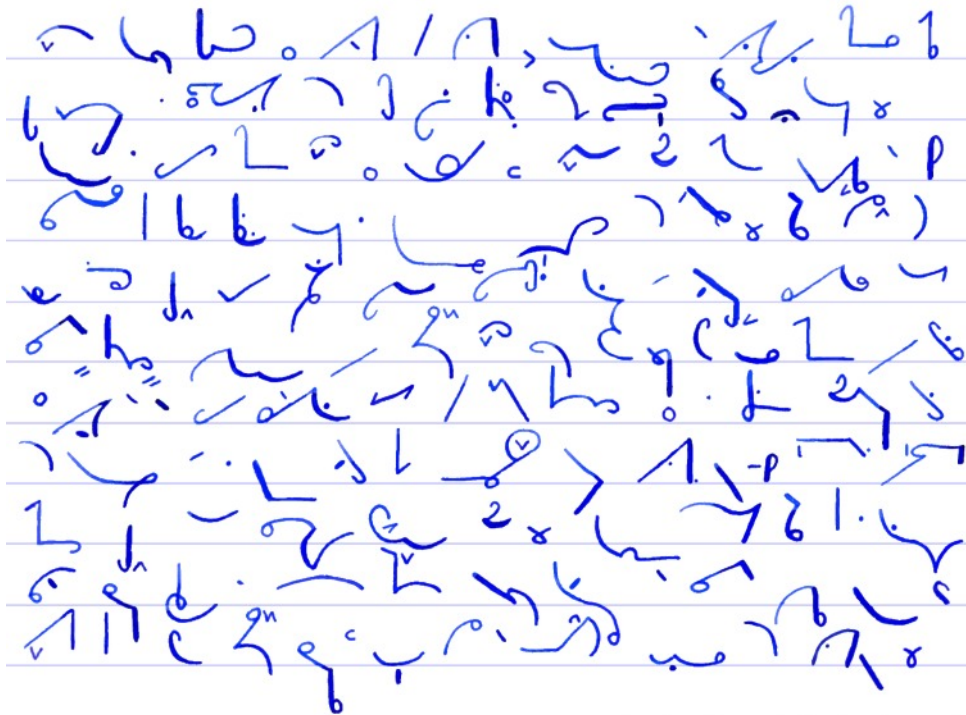
I have assembled a selection of definitions of the word habit and, like the related word inhabit, this is where the shorthand learner and writer should make their habitation, where they live and stay all the time. A habit is a tendency or disposition to act in a particular way. It is an acquired behaviour pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary. It is a recurrent, often unconscious, pattern of behaviour that is acquired through frequent repetition. It is a learned behavioural response\* that has become associated with a particular situation, especially one frequently repeated. Here are some more words that describe this most useful part of our make-up, an established custom, a

usual practice, a manner, mode, routine, tendency, inclination, predisposition, proneness, propensity, frame of mind\*, fixed\* attitude and second nature.

\* "response" Always insert the vowel after the P, as this is also the short form for "responsibility". Conversely, "responsibility" would have to be written in full if it became necessary to ensure it was not read as "response"

\* Omission phrase "frame (of) mind"

"fixed, focused" Always insert the first vowel, as they are similar in outline and meaning

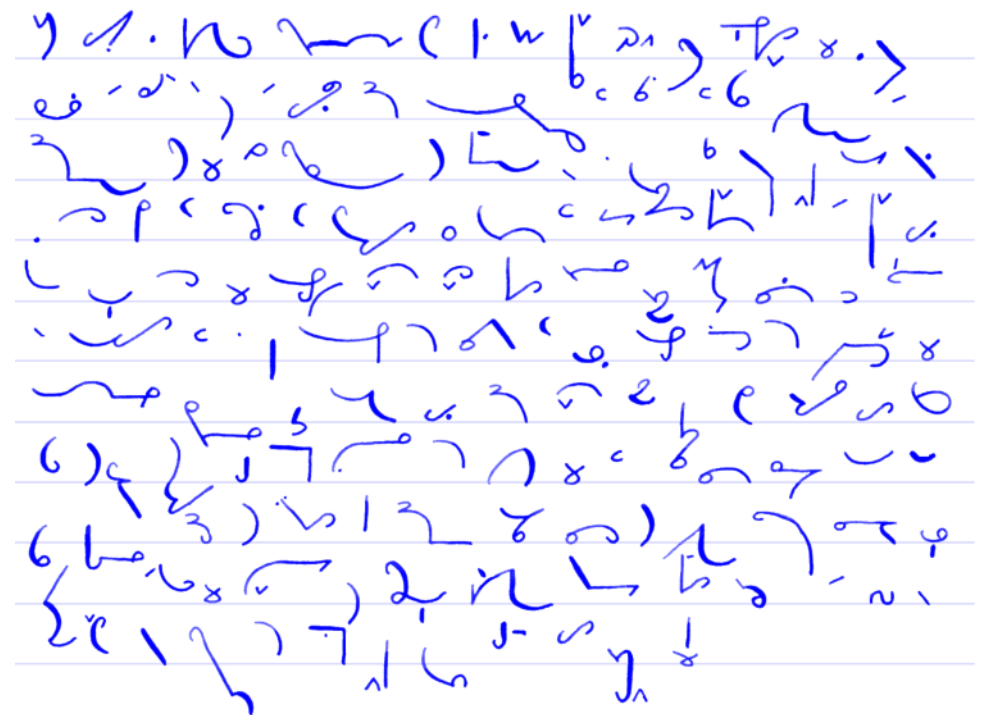


**Habits**

My favourite definition is rut, which led to the invention of railway tracks, and it is difficult to imagine a cartwheel\* or train wheel departing from the groove that has been made for it. Having a one-track mind is necessary when writing shorthand and for periods of study, as long as it does not descend into a fixation, impulsion or obsession. All this allows us to send actions down to our endlessly\* willing, well-trained, faithful and obedient servants in the Habit Department, leaving our higher mind free to consider\* other things and take our place as ruler of all we survey, which I hope at the moment\* is a desk, shorthand pad, pen or pencil and a book open at the exercise page, ready to be studied, copied, recorded and taken down in smoothly flowing shorthand. If you can manage all this at a fairly slow speed, it is only\* a

matter of time before force of habit leads to being\* able to write at ever higher speeds, with no loss of accuracy, neatness or legibility. (1274 words)

- \* "wheel" is written thus to obtain a good join
- \* "endlessly" Note that "needlessly" is written with N + D + lessly" to differentiate
- \* Omission phrases "to (con)sider" "at (the) moment"
- \* "it is only" On its own, "only" is written with full N and L strokes
- \* "to being" Based on the phrase "to be"



**Tides**

I was watching a television programme the other day about the tides around the British coastline. The beach scenes and shots of sea and waves were interspersed with chats with those living and working there. As the presenter was talking to a fisherman on his boat out in the bay, the man said that phrase that everyone is familiar with, "Time and tide wait for no man." Instantly my mind turned, of course, to shorthand, and I think the same would occur to anyone with a different interest or hobby\* that needs instant action or reaction. In my case, the speakers who would never wait

were my shorthand teachers, as they always went faster than was comfortable, so that we did not get lax or lazy. With some skill in hand, these difficulties were not so apparent at work, unless someone was reading from their scribbled notes, which was not often. Like the sea, there is no holding back the torrent of words, and you have to either be prepared or get out if you don't want to drown!

- \* "hobby" "habit" Always insert the vowel, as these are similar in outline and meaning

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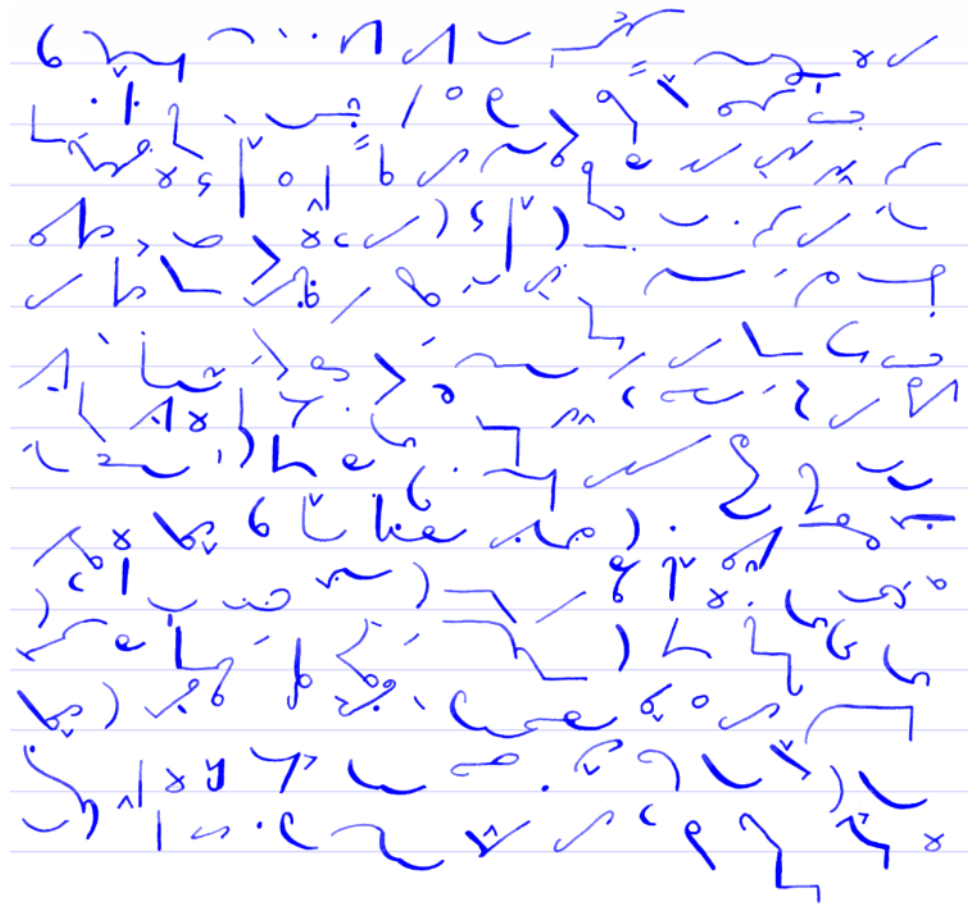
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**Tides**

This reminded me of a holiday we had in Cornwall many years ago. We took a day trip to Newquay which has several beaches separated by small cliff promontories. When the tide is out, it is one long strip of sand, and we wandered round the little headland to the next beach. When we saw that the tide was coming in, a little way off, we turned back to retrace our steps, not wanting to take the longer and less interesting route of continuing up the second beach and making our way back along the cliff top road. It was only a few yards to get round that corner, and although we started off walking on damp sand, within a minute we were splashing through the incoming ripples. Behind those

tiny advancing wavelets was a huge expanse of grey sea that had no intention of letting us keep our sandals dry. The view in front of us of yellow sand, deckchairs and distant shops and car park was much more attractive than the view behind us of rows of waves of ever-increasing height as one looked farther\* out. I did not enjoy having crossed the line from being by the sea to being in it, an ever moving boundary, one that has to be predicted and avoided.

\* "farther" Refers only to distance. Compare further" which is doubled, and refers distance, subsequent/another, additional/more



Handwritten shorthand notes in blue ink on lined paper. The notes are dense and cover approximately the top half of the page.

Tides

Later on in the seaside television programme they were looking at an old mechanical tide prediction machine that could be fed information and produce tide tables for any place in the world\*. The presenter talked to a lady who had worked there for many years before it was discontinued in the 1960's. He commented on the neatness of the index cards that contained the data\*. She said that neat handwriting was essential, as accuracy was paramount, and that mistakes were not tolerated. This last phrase fairly jumped out at me, as one of my shorthand tenets, learned at college, although with much less serious consequences than issuing an inaccurate tide table. The necessity for accuracy was not an added extra because the lady and her colleagues were especially

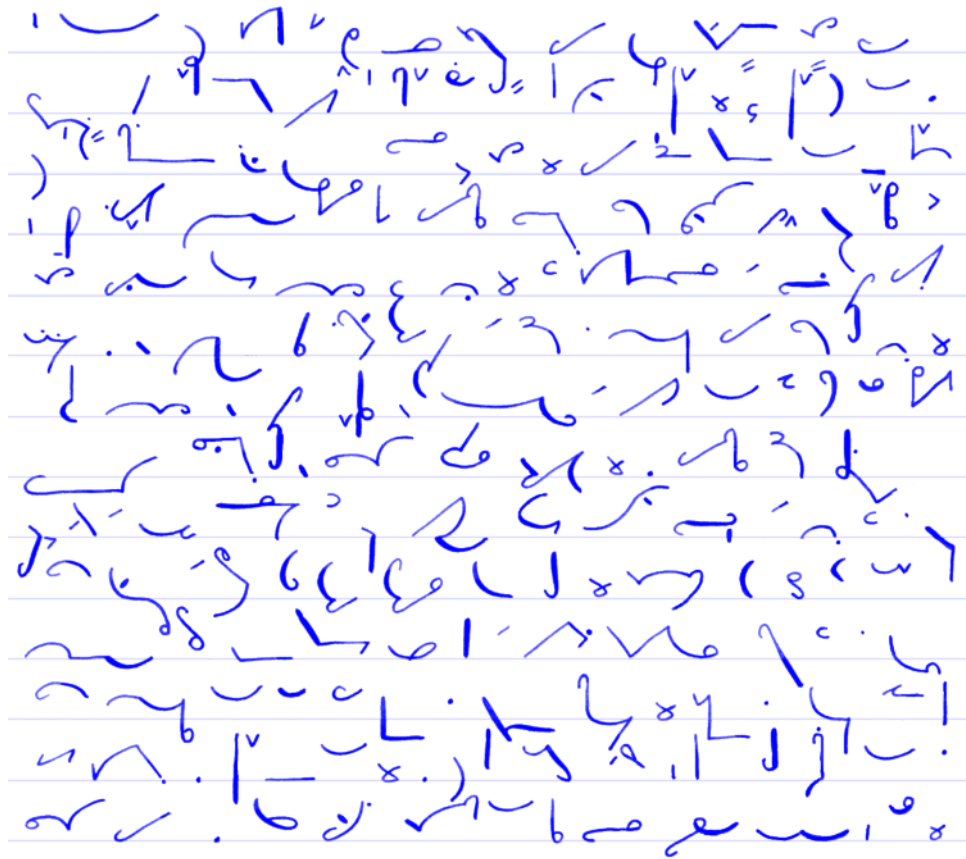
keen at their jobs, but an indispensable and immovable part of their work, never to be disregarded or neglected\*. I am sure that if they had the slightest doubt about anything, it would be checked and verified until it was perfect. In shorthand this attitude is the only one that will bring constant improvement as well as the approval by an employer of your error-free work. Wrong outlines have to be tolerated for the sake of\* getting something down and it is easier to allow them during note-taking if you know you will be sorting them out later, so that they do not trip you up again.

\* Omission phrases "in (the) world" "for (the) sake (of)"

\* "data" Insert both vowels, so it is not misread as "date"

A series of horizontal lines provided for additional notes or practice, occupying the bottom half of the page.



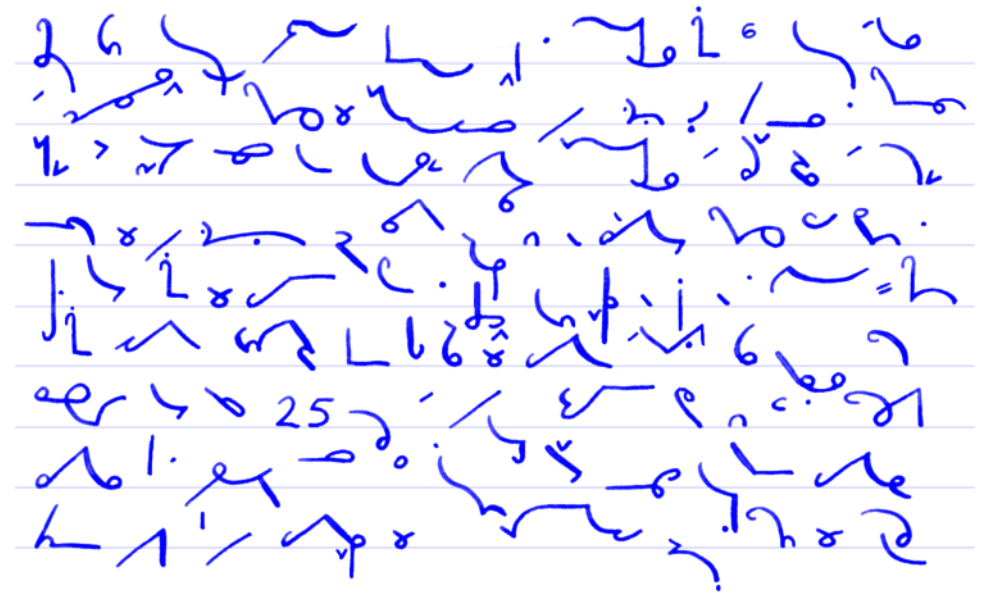


**Tides**

On another seaside holiday on the south coast of Britain, we visited Burgh Island near Plymouth, which can be reached on dry sand at low tide. When the tide was in, a sea tractor conveyed visitors across to the island. We walked back in good time, but stood a while looking at the waters creeping very slowly round both sides of the island, waiting for the moment when they would meet. With holiday-makers and eager children watching intently, the two leading edges approached each other and were a minute away from meeting. At that moment two children decided to intervene and rushed in, and with their hands started quickly scraping two small channels between them\*. The waters were

desperate to join up and knew exactly what to do, rushing along the shallow groove and meeting with a bit more force and splash than they would otherwise have done. I am sure they spent that night making plans to come back the next day and repeat the performance, probably with a few more minutes in hand, in order to\* dig a bigger trench. I took a photo and called it "Helping the tide come in". The sea had not been stopped but it had been controlled in a small way, the vast ocean altered in its course using nothing but hands. (851 words)

\* Omission phrases "betwee(n) them" "in ord(er to)"



**Short Letters 2**

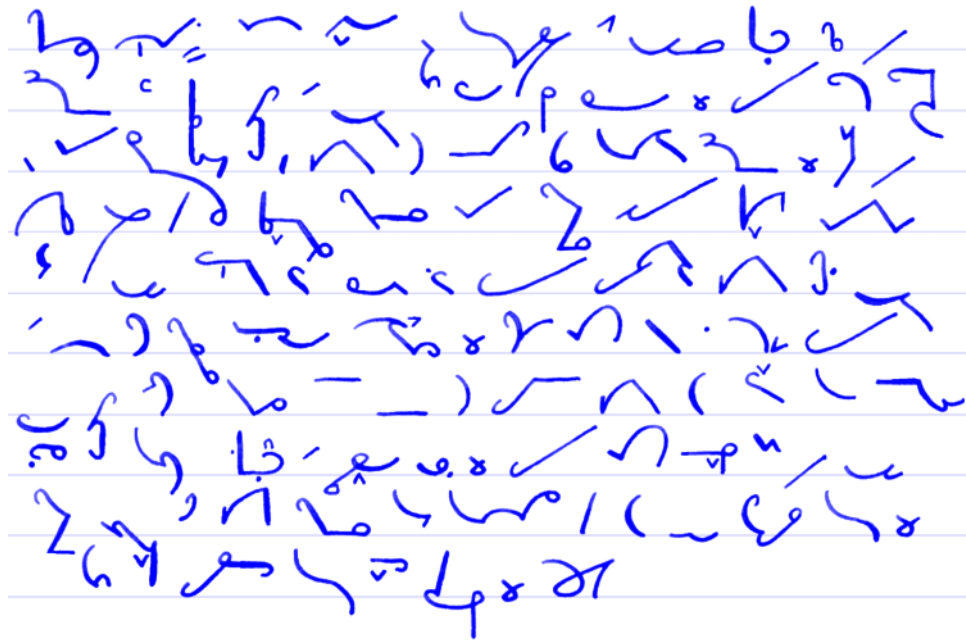
Each paragraph is 150 words, so writing one in 90 seconds will be 100wpm:

Dear Sir, Thank you for your enquiry regarding taking out a maintenance contract with us for your office and warehouse premises. I have enclosed our estimate sheet which gives an approximate idea of the annual costs for various levels of maintenance and size of buildings and area covered. Our estimator would be happy to visit you to survey the premises in order to\* submit a tender for the contract.

We can offer a discount if you decide to commit to a longer-term contract and we hope that you will be able to take advantage of this. We have operated this business very successfully for the past 25 years and are confident that we can supply you with a first rate\* service at a reasonable cost, as confirmed by the excellent feedback we have received\* which you can read on our website. I look forward to hearing from you. Yours faithfully (150 words)

Blank lined area for writing practice, consisting of ten horizontal lines.





**Short Letters 2**

Dear Mrs Murray, I am writing to thank you for your recent letter and the enclosed donation towards our work with disadvantaged\* children and young people in our city centre. We are very grateful to all our supporters who help us carry on this valuable work. I attach our latest newsletter which describes the progress of our projects, and we are delighted to report that the new club building is now complete, where we will be able to help train young people and improve their prospects of gaining employment. There will also be an area where younger children and their parents can come, so we can help them apply for government grants for their\* education and housing needs. We are also

excited about our new project to provide short holiday breaks for the families, which they could not otherwise afford. Thank you once again\* for your kind generosity. Yours sincerely\* (150 words)

\* "disadvantaged" Full outline for the past tense, the outline for "disadvantage" uses the short form

\* "for their" is written with full outlines, "if there" is doubled

\* Omission phrase "wu(n)s again" "Yours (sin)cerely"

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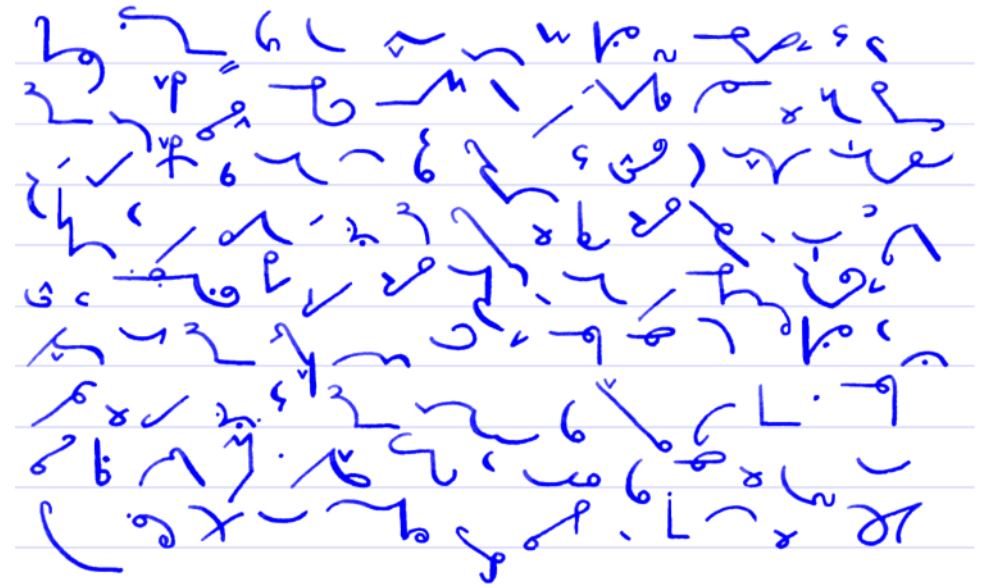
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**Short Letters 2**

Dear Mrs Clark, Thank you for writing to me about the delays you have experienced with the building work to your side house extension carried out\* by our operatives last week. I have spoken to them and to our site manager, who has informed me that this problem with the foundations was entirely unforeseen at the time that our survey and estimate were prepared. It is not always possible to know what will be found when excavations start, but we always endeavour to inform our customers of variations required in the work and provide immediate information on the extra

costs or delays that may result. We estimate that the work of moving these pipes will take an extra half day's labour, and I attach a revised quotation that includes these costs. If you have any further concerns or require any amendments, please do not hesitate to contact me. Yours sincerely\* (150 words)

\* "carried out" Halving for the T of "out"

\* Omission phrase "las(t w)eek" "Yours (sin)cerely"

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**Short Letters 2**

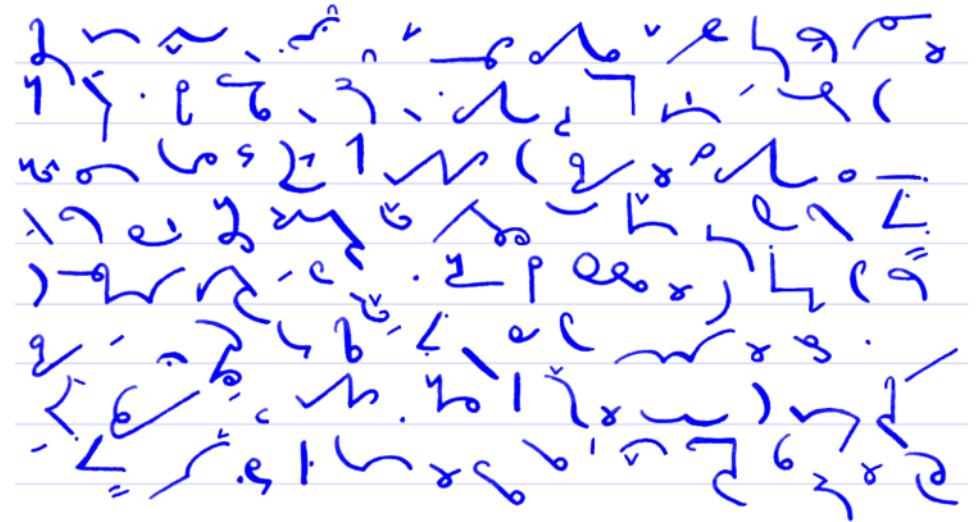
Dear John and Joan, I am writing to invite you both to the opening of our new restaurant in Green Road. We are looking forward to meeting up with all our long-standing customers and friends who have supported us at our previous premises in White Lane. The event will take place in our spacious new dining and conference room, with drinks and nibbles buffet provided. There will be a speech by the manager and some of the staff, followed by a celebration meal which we hope all our friends will enjoy. The invitation is to yourselves and two children if you wish to bring them, so please let us know\* how many of you wish

to come. In parting, we are giving out a book of discount vouchers for future meals with us, with sweets and a balloon for each child. Looking forward\* to hearing from you soon. Best wishes\* (150 words) *(Continued)*

\* "please let us know" Downward L in order to join the phrase

\* Omission phrase "looking fo(r)ward"

\* "Best wishes" Upward Ish in order to join the phrase



**Short Letters 2**

Dear Sir, I am writing to congratulate you on the excellent service I received at your store last week\*. I had bought a set of clothes to wear to a wedding, but when I got home and inspected them, I found some faults with the sewing and had to return them straight away. As the wedding is coming up very soon, I was concerned\* I would not be able to find replacements in time, but your staff member Jackie was extremely helpful and offered to find an identical\* set as soon as possible\*. She contacted the other store straight away and made arrangements for the dress and

jacket to be sent over immediately. I spent an hour shopping elsewhere and when I returned, the items had arrived. Nothing was too much trouble, and Jackie really saved the day for me. Please pass on my grateful thanks to her. Yours faithfully (150 words)

\* Omission phrases "last (w)eeek" "I was (con)cerned" "as soon as poss(ible)"

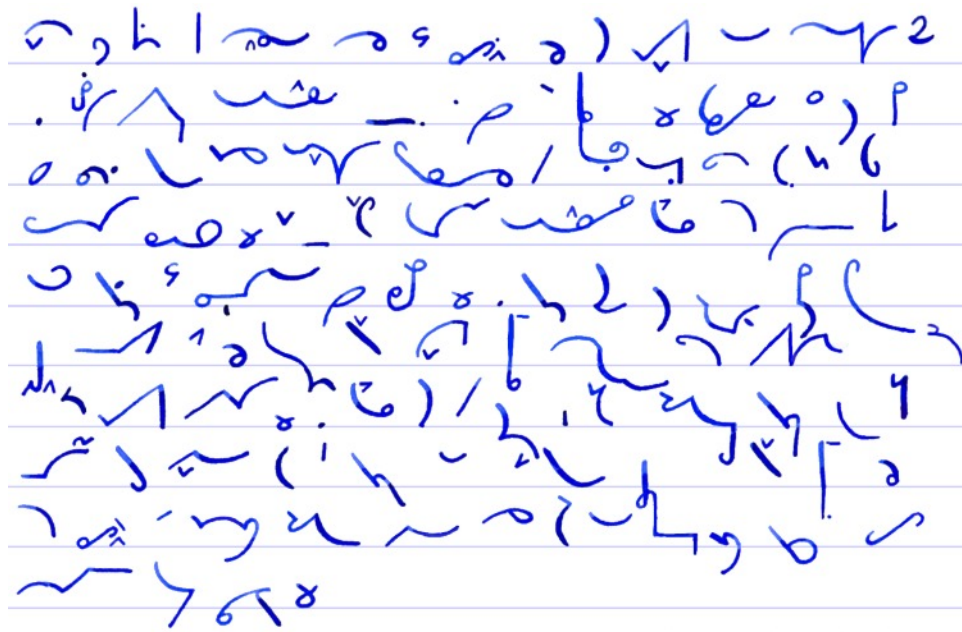
\* "ide(n)tical" Contraction











**Conversations**

My third attempt at amusing\* myself with the surrounding words was to write in mental shorthand the constantly repeated announcement giving a list of destinations. This was not as easy as it first seemed, being almost entirely place names which needed more thinking about than normal sentences. I could either follow the announcer's voice or look at the information board with the scrolling list of stations. The board was not easy to follow as it was further down the carriage and the words formed by lighted dots moving from right to left\* were hard to read rapidly. The

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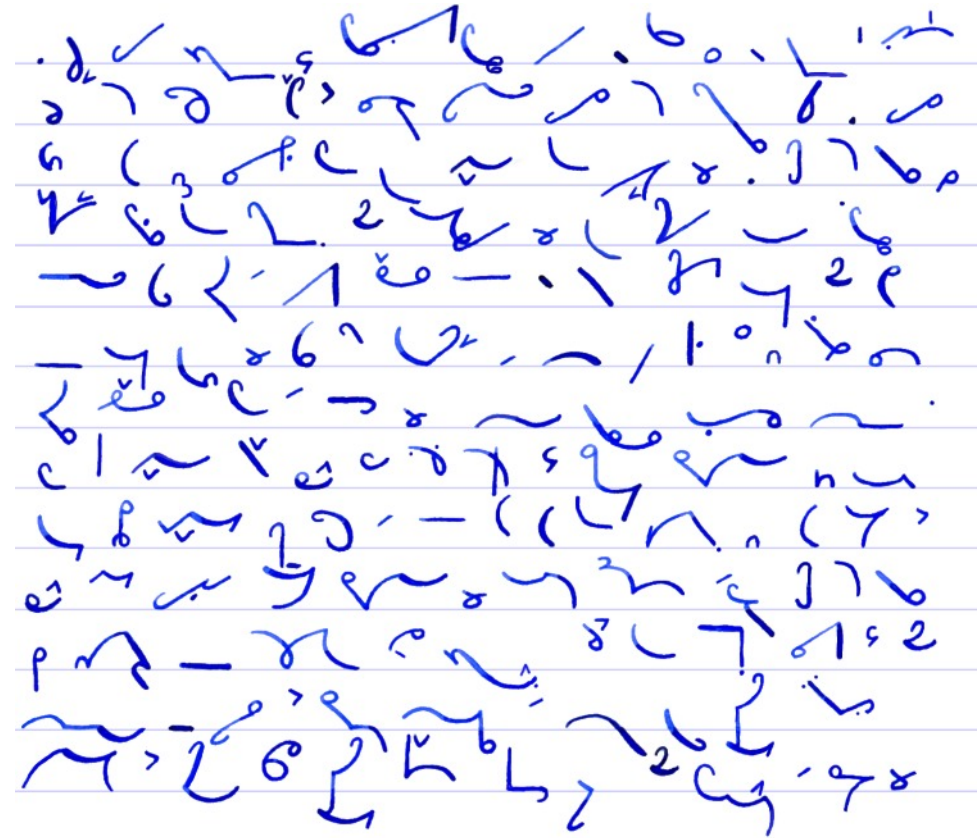
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voice was much easier but I think I would have done better if I had actually been writing them on paper, not being distracted by dotted words or surroundings, and I am sure I would have written most of them in two or three pieces, one mark for each syllable.

\* "amazing" and "amusing" Always insert the vowel

\* Omission phrase "right (to) left" The similar phrase "right and left" would best be written in full



**Conversations**

The easiest way to practise when the overheard conversations are too fast is to pick on random words or phrases, either all the simple well-known ones or perhaps just the ones that you think you would hesitate over if writing for real. The train or bus is the ideal place for practising shorthand in this way. If there are no conversations going on, then shop and road signs can all be translated\* into shorthand as they come into view. This particular variation should improve each day, as you pass the same shops and signs over and again. Many business names make an effort at writing by sound, in order to\* arrest your attention with the strange spelling, but you now have the satisfaction of writing the true version, and can thank them for helping you think

only of the sound and not the wayward English spelling. In your warm and comfortable train or bus seat, you will be able to give yourself lots\* of brownie points for getting ahead with the shorthand, making good use of the spare minutes and maybe even shortening the apparent length of the journey, as well as shortening the time taken to achieve shorthand fluency and skill. (802 words)

\* "tra(n)slated" Omits the N

\* Omission phrase "in ord(er to)"

\* "lots" and "masses" Insert the vowel as these are similar in outline and meaning